Vision, Heritage and Community

The Pankhania Family Story

Kamal and Shraddha Pankhania

In a small village in Gujarat in the early 20th Century, an artisan named Popatbhai made chairs, fine doors, cartwheels and handicrafts, lovingly crafted using traditional methods. He could have lived a simple, quiet life but instead he dreamed of something more. It was this dream that compelled him to leave Patelka, his ancestral home, and board a dhow bound for Zanzibar, to begin a new life. So begins the Pankhania family story.

Our Journey to Britain

A man of deep wisdom, Popatbhai had a sense that life beyond India's borders might offer something greater. Not for riches. But for purpose. For the dream that his skills could build something larger than a village home. Guided by hope more than certainty, he began a journey to shape the destiny of generations.

Popatbhai eventually settled in Kenya, bringing his family including his son Parshottambhai to join him. Starting from scratch, Parshottambahi worked hard to achieve financial stability, establishing himself as a construction foreman before returning to India to bring his wife and children to join him. It was in Kenya that Popatbhai's grandson, Vraj Pankhania, was born. Growing up, Vraj experienced firsthand the challenges of poverty, recalling walking barefoot to school while his peers wore shoes. This early hardship left a lasting impact on him. However, Vraj also had his father's spirit, and he was equally determined to secure a better future for himself and his family.

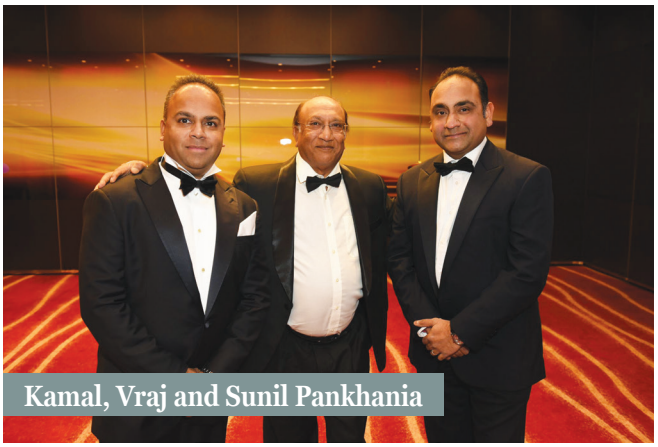
In 1969, Vraj made the decision to relocate to the UK, seeking greater opportunities to get on in life and build his own business. Armed with little more than his resolve and a small bank loan, he began his entrepreneurial journey. In 1975, he embarked on his first major project: transforming a property on Westcombe Hill into elegant mews houses. This marked the beginning of what would evolve over time into the Westcombe Group, one of the UK's premier property development companies.

The Growth of Westcombe Group

Under Vraj's leadership, the Westcombe Group initially focused on restoring and transforming historic buildings into luxurious homes. The company's reputation for revitalising Grade I and II listed buildings soon gained widespread recognition, and its portfolio expanded across London and eventually the whole country. Today, the Westcombe Group is renowned for its ability

to breathe new life into neglected, often historic buildings, turning them into beautiful residential properties, commercial spaces, and hotels. Through the hard work and vision of the Pankhania family, the artisanal spirit of Popatbhai lives on.

Vraj's vision is simple yet powerful: a building is more than a place to live - it's where life unfolds. From the earliest days, he sought to create not just beautiful homes, but meaningful communities. That ethos, passed on to his sons, Kamal and Sunil, now forms the bedrock of the Westcombe Group.



Kamal, Vraj and Sunil Pankhania

After decades of hard work growing the business, in 2003 Vraj handed over the day-to-day management of the Group to Kamal and Sunil. Kamal Pankhania took on the role of CEO, while Sunil became COO. Together, they have continued and built on their father's vision, leading the company in new ventures, including the development of hotels in partnership with global brands like Hilton, Accor, and IHG. The growth of the Westcombe Group is now focused on hotels, with European expansion planned for this year, as well as exciting projects in the Middle East.

Kamal Pankhania with
His Majesty King Charles

The Westcombe Family

The company's ongoing success is built not just on business acumen, but on the Pankhania family's enduring values of courage, trust, and a building a better future. Kamal and Sunil, having worked in the business from a young age, carried forward the principles and values instilled in them by their parents.

They believe in treating employees as family, as reflected in the company's culture with many of Westcombe's staff having worked there for over 25 years. Creating an environment where everyone feels valued and invested has been central to the company's success.

Kamal and Sunil are also committed to ensuring that the next generation of the Pankhania family will continue to lead the business and carry forward the family legacy.

Giving Back: The Westcombe Foundation

Another core Pankhania value has always been giving back to society. Vraj remembers his father in Kenya always giving what he could to help those who were worse off, despite struggling himself. He passed those values down to his sons, leading to the establishment of the Westcombe Foundation in 2008. Since then, the Foundation has supported countless charitable causes both in the UK and abroad.

The Foundation's work has touched lives in many countries, with significant contributions to disaster relief efforts, healthcare, and

education. In Kenya, the Foundation has funded wheelchairs and artificial limbs for those affected by accidents, while also supporting the Lions SightFirst Eye Hospital. In Nepal, after the devastating earthquake of 2015, the Foundation's donation helped rebuild 22 schools and 132 classrooms, helping children get back to school after the tragedy.

In addition to its international work, the Westcombe Foundation has made a significant impact in the UK, partnering with charities such as Crisis and the Trussell Trust to address homelessness and food insecurity. In 2019 the Foundation set up its own housing association to provide affordable housing, the Dholak Partnership.

Today Kamal's wife Shraddha continues Vraj's philanthropic legacy. Under her leadership, the Foundation has pivoted its focus to tackling the growing issue of homelessness in the UK, aiming to provide shelter and support to those most in need. In 2023, the family announced plans to create a community hub in the UK, which will offer services such as a homeless shelter and food bank.

The Foundation is also proud to support environmental initiatives, including The Queen's Green Canopy project.

A Legacy of Aspiration and Community Leadership

The Westcombe Group's story is one of transformation, both in terms of business success and community impact. Vraj's humble beginnings, combined with his commitment

Vraj Pankhania Foundation

Vraj and Kamal Pankhania during the Royal Charity Polo Cup

to hard work and giving back, have set the stage for a legacy that spans generations. Kamal and Sunil now work to ensure that Westcombe Group continues to thrive, while also expanding the company's reach through strategic partnerships and innovative developments.

But for the Pankhania family's, success is not measured by financial achievements alone. Their true measure of success lies in the ability to give back to the communities in which they operate. Whether through the Westcombe Foundation's work, injecting a new lease of life into properties or by providing affordable housing for frontline workers, the family's hope is that that their impact is felt far beyond the walls of its developments.

As the Pankhania family built a life and successful business in the UK, they are also proud to contributed to preserving heritage by sensitively restoring and repurposing historic buildings, giving them a new lease of life for the 21st Century and ensuring they remained operational and accessible. Vraj was recognised for this by the Royal Society of Arts who granted him a Fellowship in 2023.

Looking to the future, Kamal plans to continue to build on this legacy, ensuring that Westcombe Group remains not only a leader in property development but also a force for good in the world. The Pankhania family's journey from humble beginnings to becoming leaders in both business and philanthropy is a powerful reminder that success, when coupled with a commitment to family and community, can leave a lasting impact for generations to come.